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The U-2 Affairs

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The jeweled prose of Premier Khrushchev's protest-note writer at the Soviet Foreign Ministry has again flashed to the world Russia's cherished U-2 theme: that the U. S. is faithless, that its itch for sky-spying has become chronic, and that Russia's punishment will be swift. If nothing else has happened in the changeover at Washington from Eisenhower to Kennedy, the difference in the response to the U-2 episodes is almost worth the wrack and wrangle of the election campaign. It is a grim thought that each new American President may have to be judged by how he reacts to some new U-2 crisis.

There are always cases where the head of state must tell something less than the truth when his country is caught in a tight spot. The trouble with President Eisenhower in his U-2 episode was that he first told a cover-story he and then told more truth than was politically prudent.

Hence the judgment of David Wise and Thomas B. Ross, in their level-headed book, "The U-2 Affair" (Random), which appeared last spring—two years after the event itself. By assuming responsibility and by making a virtue of what was at best a nasty necessity, Eisenhower in effect implied that the overflights would go on. In this context, Wise and Ross rightly conclude, Khrushchev had little choice except to mangle the summit.

There is another judgment by Wise and Ross that I like. It is their view that the Powers mission over Russia was not by the President's order or even with his knowledge, but a decision of the intelligence people, for whom their intelligence work had ceased to be an instrument of foreign policy but had become an end in itself with which foreign policy like the summit meetings sometimes coincided.

This was, I think, the real lesson of the first U-2 episode, and it must be that even leaders have learned from it. The question is not so much whether Eisenhower was right or wrong in his response or whether Kennedy is a proved more skillful. It is that the man's way of handling it, that the world has grown more sophisticated. The more sophisticated the world is the one which is the one which

reny today) seems to have eaten un- easily into our imagination: "Who's in charge here?"

If things have not improved from the Allen Dulles tenure in the CIA to the John McCone tenure, and if the technicians are still running the show, then we shall be in for a bad time. That is why I hope fervently that President Kennedy was truthful as well as prudent when he told the Russians that the violation of Soviet territory over Sakhalin was due to wind, not design.

There is nothing wrong with having U-2s in the Pacific if they are (as this one seems to have been) sampling the effects of nuclear tests, whether Soviet or American. But it would be stupid at this date to continue the "electronic espionage" at the costly diplomatic price the Russians are exacting.

This diplomatic and political use of every episode, large and small, has become the characteristic skill of Khrushchev, I suspect. I suspect that Khrushchev himself is largely responsible for it, and that he is in charge over there. He used the episode of the flying German boy at the wall to give the East Germans greater authority in East Berlin; he used the episode of the student shooting in Havana to announce his new pact with Soviet Cuba; and now he uses the Sakhalin episode to revive memories of the first U-2.

The art of the political act has been too closely defined in American politics to apply only to politics. Even more urgent than teaching our youth science and technology is the task of teaching them the art of our time—the art of graceful engagement in the world and the politics of a possible peace.